



## Jamaica

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 4,244 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.7 million. According to the 2001 census, the population's religious affiliation is: Church of God 24 percent, Seventh-day Adventist 11 percent, Baptist 7 percent, Pentecostal 10 percent, Anglican 4 percent, Roman Catholic 2 percent, United Church 2 percent, Methodist 2 percent, Jehovah's Witnesses 2 percent, Moravian 1 percent, Brethren 1 percent, unstated 3 percent, and "other" 10 percent. The category "other" included 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha'is. Twenty-one percent claimed no religious affiliation.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Parliament may freely act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the Government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Roman Catholic Church or with Protestant denominations; there also is at least one Jewish school.

Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration controls that govern other foreign visitors.

The Christian holy days of Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

##### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government recognizes Rastafarianism as a religion. Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly target them; however, it is not clear whether the police actions reflect religious discrimination or are due to the group's illegal use of marijuana, which is an element of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003, a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use in

private. At the end of the period covered by this report, the committee's recommendations had not been considered by the full Parliament.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a well-established tradition of religious tolerance and diversity. In the past, members of the Rastafarian community reported isolated incidents of discrimination against them in schools and the workplace; however, no specific cases of discrimination were documented during the period covered by this report. Local media outlets provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on matters of religion.

In April 2005, the Ministry of Education pulled from primary schools a religious textbook that, according to government lawyers, discriminated against Rastafarians. The book, used at the grade five level, included an illustration of a Rastafarian man, dressed in a red, yellow, and green tam, grabbing a woman's handbag and running away. The caption read "Rasta committing a crime." The book was pulled from schools after a review by education officials, who deemed it offensive, unauthorized, and unconstitutional.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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